

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 210 721

CS 503 673

AUTHOR Mayer, Kenneth
TITLE Developing and Teaching the Specialized Oral Business Communication Course.
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Business Communication Association (Phoenix, AZ, October 14-17, 1981).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; *Classroom Techniques; *Course Content; *Curriculum Development; Higher Education; *Speech Curriculum; *Speech Skills; Teaching Guides

ABSTRACT

The guidelines provided in this paper are intended to help teachers develop a separate course on oral business communication skills that would follow a course on written business communication. Following a review of research corroborating the need for a specialized business speech course, suggestions are enumerated concerning course objectives, content, oral assignments, written assignments, class size, appropriate instructional materials, evaluation procedures, and additional instructional ideas. A model syllabus incorporating these teaching and learning activities is also proposed: (BL)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED210721

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kenneth Mayer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

DEVELOPING AND TEACHING THE SPECIALIZED
ORAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION COURSE

Kenneth Mayer, Cleveland State University

ABSTRACT

Many schools of business administration are developing special-
ized oral business communication skills in a separate course sequenced
after the written business communications course. The research evi-
dence which establishes the value of effective oral communication in
business and professional careers is reviewed. This paper then out-
lines a collegiate oral business communications course with emphasis on
course content, course design, evaluation methods, and suggestions for
instructional activities and assignments. A model syllabus incorpora-
ting these teaching and learning activities is proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Business communication professors will verify the challenge of
developing both written and oral communication competencies in one bus-
iness communication course. Too much must be done to bring up the typ-
ical business student's communication skills to the minimal level re-
quired for job entry and advancement. Thus, the specialized business
oral communication course is growing in acceptance and popularity in
colleges of business administration.

The separate business speech course offers several advantages.
Primarily, it permits much more time to develop the full spectrum of
business communication skills. In the business communication content
struggle, the written component usually triumphs over the oral compon-
ent. Specialized oral communication becomes the stepchild, or, more
likely, the orphan with no attention whatsoever. The dual course se-
quence allows an adequate developmental opportunity for both the writ-
ten and oral skills required for career success in a business profes-
sion. It facilitates articulation and integration of the complete
scope of business communication competencies at an applied level.

Numerous secondary advantages accrue to separate courses.
Business communication instructors can widen their teaching options
and develop new areas of consulting expertise. Furthermore, a syner-
gistic effect often results. Oral business communication provides a
stimulating change of pace from writing courses, yet is a natural com-
plement to them.

CS503673

Oral Communication in Business has been offered in the James J. Nance College of Business Administration at Cleveland State University since 1973. All business students must take a speech course, either this one or the general speech course offered by the communication department. At least ten sections are scheduled yearly. It is an upper division course generally taken in the junior year. Written business communication is a prerequisite.

This paper examines the objectives, content, and implementation of the oral business communication course after first surveying the pertinent research evidence.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature corroborates the need for a specialized business speech course and helps delineate its content. The currency of most studies attests to the accelerating research and teaching interest in this specialized business communication area.

Hewing surveyed (1) business firms which hire business graduates and (2) business graduates of the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater from 1971-1976. Oral communication skills were rated as highly important by 58 percent of BBA graduates and 93 percent of the firms. Because 49 percent indicated that one course was insufficient, Hewing suggested a second course in business communication be offered. Fifty-six percent reported talking to groups on the job, and 62 percent indicated that oral presentations to large and small groups should be strengthened. They also advocated greater videotape experience [3].

Rader and Wunsch recommended oral business communications be required for all business majors based on similar findings from a survey of Arizona State University business graduates from 1973-1977 [5].

Blitzstein reported in 1980 that 69 percent of respondents employed in business firms, government agencies, and industry associations across the country rated oral communication skills as very important to obtaining employment and 75 percent rated it very important to on-the-job success, above other factors such as written communication and personality [1].

Woodcock determined the characteristic business communication problems of selected managerial trainees in the Memphis, Tennessee, area in a 1977 study. Oral communication was the only communication problem area cited by all of the groups studied--management trainees, their secretaries, and their immediate supervisors. Interestingly, a contradiction existed between trainees' knowledge of oral communication theory and their ability to put it into practice. Woodcock, too, suggested increased teaching time in this problem area [7].

Gump analyzed rank-order positions of concepts pertinent to collegiate business communication courses as perceived by business professors and executives in a five-state midwest area in 1977. The two

groups generally did not agree in terms of their value in business careers. For example, business executives ranked effective dictation and conference preparation in the top fifteen; professors did not. These discrepancies between teachers and practitioners may mean that business communication professors do not have an accurate view of the relative importance of business speech skills and thus may not be meeting the oral communication needs of future business executives [2].

In a 1975 national survey of business communication professors conducted by an ad hoc evaluation committee of the American Business Communication Association (ABCA), respondents felt that more time should be devoted to four communication areas which are traditionally oral business communication content. They are platform speaking, small group communication, interviewing, and dictating [4].

Finally, Varner and Varner queried ABCA members at four-year institutions in the U.S. in 1980. In their sample, 54 schools require one business communication course for undergraduate business majors; 10 require 2; and 18 require none. Twenty-three schools specially offer a course called "Oral Business Communication" [6].

OBJECTIVES

Because this course is probably the first and only speech communication course the business major will have, every attempt has been made to relate the course to the wide variety of oral communication activities in the business environment. Course topics and assignments are all directly business related.

The course objectives are that the student will be able to:

1. Make impromptu and extemporaneous presentations on business topics with effective presentation design and delivery technique.
2. Select appropriate audio-visual support and use them correctly.
3. Use effectively the related oral business skills of interviewing, conference planning, and conference management.

CONTENT

To develop these managerial competencies ten content areas were identified from business communication research and curriculum development literature, and observation and contact with the business community.

1. Orientation to the nature and demands of oral communication in a business and professional setting. This includes developing an

awareness of speech opportunities which occur directly as part of employment and indirectly as businesspeople actively participate in professional, community, and social organizations. Students are exposed to audience analysis and its role in speech preparation. Very early the normal and universal fear of public speaking is acknowledged and suggestions for coping with it presented.

Crucial foundational concepts are the four delivery styles and their correct usage. The written and memorized modes are de-emphasized as useful delivery modes for the business speaker. The impromptu (i.e., spontaneous, unplanned) and extemporaneous (i.e., planned, researched, outlined, and practiced) modes have the most utility for businesspeople and are the emphasis of the course. Developing a natural, relaxed extemporaneous talk manner in which the speaker talks from brief notes but chooses the exact phraseology as he/she reacts to and with the audience becomes the core of the subsequent in-class talk opportunities.

2. Presentation design or "what to do before you face an audience." This encompasses speech assignment analysis, systematic planning, talk organization patterns, note preparation and use, and practice techniques. Students are taught how to use the three-part organizational pattern (opener, body, and close) and how to adapt it to the specific purpose, audience, and event.

3. Delivery technique or "what to do in front of an audience." Included here are demeanor, posture, voice, and body language. The ultimate goal is to use these tools conversationally and naturally to enhance the desired meaning and nuances of the message content without distraction.

4. Audio-visual aids. Their benefits and criteria for use are analyzed. Students become acquainted with the various types of direct and projected aids, how to select those most appropriate, and how to incorporate them into their delivery effectively.

5. Question-and-answer techniques. How to prepare for, listen to, and respond to questions in a receptive, sharing manner are stressed.

6. Interviewing. Interview usage and interview types are introduced followed by strategies for planning and conducting interviews.

7. Dictation. Sophisticated word-processing technology demands efficient work originators if the heralded increases in written communication quality and efficiency are to be realized. Students are oriented to word processing equipment and procedures, and provided with structured activities to develop the required pre-dictation, dictation, and post-dictation skills.

This is one oral communication area which is often retained in the written course. On the surface, it is a speech competency, but it is so closely related to the planning and structural aspects of written

communication that a very defensible case can be made for developing dictation competencies in the business writing course.

8. Group processes. This forms the theoretical basis for small-group interaction in a business setting. Discussed are small-group theory, problem-solving techniques, and decision-making skills. Students are exposed to the repertoire of traditional and non-traditional interaction techniques available (for example, discussion groups, brain-storming, simulations, and role-playing).

9. Conference planning. Types of business meetings from short to long, small to large, and informal to formal are examined. This is followed by agenda development and systematic arrangement of meeting details (speakers, facilities, food, lodging, transportation, and budgeting, as relevant to the specific meeting situation).

10. Conference management. Strategies of effective leaders and participants are covered. Parliamentary procedures for meetings of government-related, professional, and social organizations are discussed.

IMPLEMENTATION

This is a great deal of content for 40 to 45 contact hours. This advice based on experience with hundreds of business speech students should guide the designing and managing of an oral business communication course.

Class Size

Twenty to thirty students per section is ideal. There is enough class time to schedule an ample variety of impromptu and extemporaneous talks. There is the group interaction desirable for certain instructional activities. A class of this size simulates a realistic audience contact. A section with less than 20 students often becomes too intimate to provide an authentic audience presence or to experiment with group interaction techniques.

Course Materials

Only three or four years ago, few specialized business speech texts were available. Heavy reliance was, therefore, required on lecture, discussion, handouts, films, and other media presentations to develop the course content. That has changed. Now many comprehensive and readable books are on the market which come close to the ideal mix of course content. The textbook/outside reading approach reduces teacher talk and domination, thus increasing students' application opportunities for oral presentations and group process techniques. See Appendix 1 for a list of suggested business speech texts.

Films remain an excellent adjunct. For a concrete, dramatic,

35-minute film on presentation design, show "Anatomy of a Presentation" produced by Roundtable Films. "Speaking Effectively" is a 23-minute film produced by McGraw-Hill which illustrates delivery techniques very well. Other films permit students to observe dynamic processes like group management, interviewing, or problem-solving, which do not lend themselves to discussion or which are difficult to simulate realistically in a classroom setting with limited time.

Talk Assignments

A model syllabus (under the quarter plan) is shown in Figure 1. Note that all course topics are applied in speaking or writing assignments.

A minimum of three extemporaneous talks on business subjects is recommended. Here is an effective oral presentation sequence: A relatively easy first talk is a book talk where the student speaker discusses the major ideas of a business-related book. The second talk must incorporate an audio-visual aid as an integral part. For example, students might research a Fortune 1000 company and discuss a production process using flow charts or financial condition using line graphs. A more demanding third talk is a business history. Speakers are responsible for two dimensions--providing a chronological overview of past, present, and future; and a functional overview of business operations. To develop interview skills, students gather their data by interviewing a businessperson, usually a proprietor or partner in a small business or top manager of a large business. The last two talks are followed by one- or two-minute question-and-answer sessions to develop this technique, to improve rapport and interaction with the audience, and to permit measurement of the communication climate in evaluation.

The oral presentations so far described are carefully inter-related. One, talks become longer (for example, 4, 5, and 6 minutes, respectively). Two, each is progressively more challenging to plan and present. Three, each talk makes a proportionately greater contribution to the final grade (for example, 15, 20, and 25 points, respectively). This allows for sequential and developmental growth of presentation and delivery skills. Undue pressure is especially detrimental since delivery skills are the product of experience. This approach provides time for confidence to emerge and with confidence comes naturalness and spontaneity, hallmarks of comfortable, poised successful speakers.

Another extemporaneous talk, which can be scheduled if time, is a persuasive presentation. These usually employ the more sophisticated, indirect organizational pattern often used by businesspeople in oral proposals or sales presentations. Here the speaker must not only inform but convince and motivate the listener through psychological appeals to change beliefs and then act on those beliefs.

Written Assignments

To apply concepts which are not otherwise demonstrated in oral presentations, written reports are used. This also has the beneficial

FIGURE 1

SYLLABUS

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignments</u>
1	Orientation/Introduction)	
	Presentation design,)	
	delivery techniques)	Impromptu* and extemporaneous
	)	talk opportunities
	)	(non-graded)
2	(Continued))	
	)	
3	Audio-visual aids)	
	)	
4	)	Extemporaneous talks--
	)	videotaped, non-graded)
5	Interviewing)	
	)	
6	Group Processes)	Book talks
	)	Speaker evaluation
7	Conference planning)	
	)	Visual aid talks
8	Conference management)	
9	(Continued))	Business history talks
	)	Interview analysis
	)	Conference planning report
10	Review and growth analysis)	

* Impromptu talk opportunities are given throughout the quarter as time permits.

auxiliary effect of reinforcing students' business report preparation and writing skills. Here are three report ideas: A speaker evaluation is a critique of the presentation and delivery of a speaker to sensitize students to the complexities of extemporaneous speaking and to improve students' evaluation skills which are necessary for self-assessment and peer evaluation. Ideally, students observe business or professional people speaking on business topics in business settings, exactly the type of speaking they will be faced with as they move through their career paths.

A second report might be an interview analysis, which is a self-analysis of the student's interview technique used to gather the business history data.

For another written assignment, have students prepare and defend a conference plan for a complete business meeting, either a short staff meeting or a multiple-agenda conference. Because the latter requires considerable work, a group project approach can be used, which serves as a vehicle for application and evaluation of small-group techniques, too.

Additional Instructional Ideas

All these oral and written assignments are formal, graded, and constitute the bulk of the items which determine the student's final grade. The following are additional supplemental, diagnostic, and/or application techniques which can be selected dependent on student need and class time.

Impromptu talk opportunities are excellent devices for easing students, generally reluctant, hesitant, and insecure at first, into public speaking during the first third of the course. They are useful as ice-breakers and confidence builders. They can emphasize one or two short-term presentation goals (using a clear three-part organizational pattern, for instance) or delivery goals (perhaps becoming conscious of and eliminating verbal filler). Additionally, they give the speaker a chance to think on his feet, to structure and present a 30-second to two-minute talk with little or no advance preparation by relying on day-to-day experience with general-purpose personal or business-related topics.

Videotaping sessions once or twice during the course provide good diagnostic and evaluative opportunities. Probably for the first time, students will see and hear themselves as their audience does. They may cringe at first, but they see concrete evidence of strengths and progress, and also identify weaknesses to eliminate gradually in subsequent presentations.

The oral business communication professor should use group processes innovatively, too. This exposes class members to potential uses of group techniques such as role-playing, simulations, and brainstorming in business group setting. Additionally, they are useful as a teaching device to develop a feeling for the complex dynamics of inter-

viewing and group management. Role-playing interview dyads or simulating a staff meeting compel students to apply concepts little appreciated or internalized until practiced in a fluid interactive setting.

Evaluation

In business speech courses evaluation takes three forms. First, self-evaluation after talks, especially in connection with videotaped talks. Second, peer evaluation. If divided into several evaluation teams, the students can take turns providing feedback to classmates. Each speaker thus gets a set of student evaluations for analysis; observers widen their own repertoires incidentally by observing what other students experience. Third, instructor evaluation, which is the sole grade determination device. Numerical grades are calculated using a five-point scale from "excellent" to "poor" on eleven items (see Appendix 2) which are selected and weighted in accordance with the type of talk and goals for each talk. Initially, presentation design is weighted more heavily than delivery technique. This is consistent with the philosophy that a natural delivery is a product of experience. At the course's conclusion, both contribute equally in grade determination.

Evaluation is further complicated by more acute student sensitivity regarding delivery. Students are more sensitive to constructive criticism of how they speak, move, and interact, which are often personality-related. This defensiveness is understandable. It can be overcome substantially by cultivating a mutually supportive, empathetic classroom environment in which speakers can experiment and grow. Maintenance of a trusting, open student-instructor rapport is essential, too.

Diagnostic feedback conferences are strongly advocated. Here student and instructor can talk person to person and privately about specific or unique student concerns drawing together input from the three types of evaluation. Because grades must of necessity be more qualitative than quantitative in oral communication, feedback conferences foster understanding of the grading process and, more importantly, aid in behavior modification and goal setting by students.

CONCLUSION

Adequate business communication competencies in writing and speaking are difficult to develop in one course. Through this survey of objectives, content, and implementation strategies, perhaps more business communication professors will increase their commitment to business speech.

APPENDIX 1

SELECTIVE LIST OF ORAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS

Business and Professional Speaking, 3rd edition; William S. Tacey;
William C. Brown Company, 1980.

Business and Professional Speech Communication, 2nd edition; Harold
P. Zelko and Frank E. X. Dance; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Communication for Business and the Professions; Patricia Hayes Bradley
and John E. Baird, Jr.; William E. Brown Company, 1980.

Public Communication in Business and the Professions; Jerry W. Koehler
and John I. Sisco; West Publishing Company, 1981.

Speech Communication in Business and the Professions; Larry A. Samovar,
Stephen W. King, and Myron W. Lustig; Wadsworth Publishing Company,
1981.

APPENDIX 2
EVALUATION FORM

ORAL PRESENTATION BY:

TIME:

GRADE:

ITEM EVALUATED	EXC.	GOOD	SAT.	FAIR	POOR	COMMENTS
1. CONTENT						
ORGANIZATION						
2. <u>Opener</u>						
3. <u>Body</u>						
4. <u>Close</u>						
DELIVERY						
5. <u>Reference to notes/Eye contact</u>						
6. <u>Poise--stage presence</u>						
7. <u>Voice</u>						
8. <u>Body Language</u>						
9. <u>Vocabulary</u>						
10. COMMUNICATION CLIMATE						
11. A/V AIDS (if applicable)						

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Blitzstein, Allen, "What Employers Are Seeking in Business Graduates," The Collegiate Forum (Winter, 1980/81), p. 7.
- [2] Gump, Phyllis S., "Identification and Evaluation of Concepts Pertinent to the Basic Business Communication Course at the Collegiate Level," mimeographed report from doctoral dissertation, May, 1980.
- [3] Hewing, Pernell Hayes, "Are Courses in Business Communications Meeting the Needs of Employers?" Journal of Business Education, Vol. 55 (May, 1980), pp. 345-347.
- [4] Persing, Bobbye, et al., "Student Evaluation of the Basic Course in Business Communication," The ABCA Bulletin, Vol. 39 (June, 1976), pp. 1-10.
- [5] Rader, Martha H., and Wunsch, Alan P., "A Survey of Communication Practices of Business School Graduates by Job Category and Undergraduate Major," Journal of Business Communication, Vol. 17 (Summer, 1980), pp. 33-41.
- [6] Varner, Iris, and Varner, Carson, "Who is Qualified to Teach Business Communication?" paper presented at the 1980 American Business Communication Association National Convention, Washington, D.C., December 30, 1980.